

Le Bon Journal

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Volume 1 Issue 10: Read a review to learn what you've missed

With the overwhelming number of events going on and the limited amount of publication space available, there is a serious shortage of independent reviews and reviewers. A well-written review can be more enjoyable to read than being at the event itself.

Ealing summer jazz festival

I wonder how many tourists know about the free outdoor festivals in London. Earlier this summer I had refuted someone's claim that New York is the place to be. It's too hot, and the subways smell awful.

In London, however, people wait all year long for the English Summer. The weather is perfect to be spent outdoors. And the days are long.

Take the Ealing Summer Jazz Festival for instance. It's the largest outdoor jazz festival in the country, running over a week long. Starting last Saturday 3rd August, it ends 11th August 2002.

Jazz is the kind of music you can listen to while you move around, talk, drink, eat, and (unfortunately) smoke. You would never be able to do this in a classical concert. To play good jazz, you have to feel it in your veins. You have to know how to improvise.

This year's festival has been plagued by rain and unsettled weather. Unhindered, people still flock here. A huge canopy houses several hundred people, me included. It would be almost perfect if it could be smoke-free. But then I wouldn't be able to eat my Caribbean fried fish either.

Daniela Clynes and jazz trio

I knew not what the evening would hold for me at Pizza in the Park tonight. Aside from seeing my friend and listening to some music, I had no expectations.

Thus I was pleasantly surprised, if not mesmerised, by the versatility of the jazz/cabaret singer Daniela Clynes and the magnificent

performance of the pianist James Pearson. Theirs was actually a singer with a jazz trio - James Pearson on the piano, Sam Burgess on the bass, and Mike Bradley on the drums.

A solo pianist opened the evening at 9 pm, preceding the trio act. We talked and ate throughout his performance. Afterwards the jazz trio moved on stage.

We stopped talking, stunned by pianist Pearson's virtuosity. He made jazz seem like Rachmaninoff. Next the singer walked on stage. She sang a typically sounding jazz piece. I couldn't help notice how sensual it was. Jazz is indeed music for the night. The dark room was intimate with feeling by then.

Daniela Clynes spoke. She introduced Polish songs she and her Polish-born mother had translated and set to music. These three pieces were quite delightful, if not funny. I later learned that her mother was the famous pianist who taught the Alexander Technique at the Guildhall School of Music.

Although she was keen on Sting's "When We Dance", I didn't think it suited her voice. Her jazz and cabaret repertoire were quite extraordinary, including the ones she wrote herself. So why take a well-known piece that everyone's used to hearing otherwise?

Some pieces were truly hilarious, like the "Masochist's Tango." Hers was a combination of singing and acting - that's what made it so unique.

BBC Proms

It's been almost ten years since I had last attended the BBC Proms concerts. The Royal Albert Hall was either undergoing renovation or I was too busy to attend.

I like the philosophy of the Proms. "Prom" stands for "promenade" - or to walk and be seen. There are always seats available at these summer concerts, which run from

mid July to mid September. The cheapest tickets go for £4.00 each at the door. You can queue for the Arena, the centre of the circle, where I last sat and stood. Or you can queue for the Gallery, the highest level. On the day of the concert, the box office can sell almost 500 tickets each (Arena and Gallery = 1,000 tickets). Other seats are more expensive and often sold out. But ticket touters are your saving grace if you prefer to go there last minute. Season ticket holders can buy gallery seats for these seventy-some concerts for £135 total, amounting to less than £2.00 a ticket.

Since I've never been at the Gallery level, I decided to give it a try, not least that my ex-colleague had told me about her "Bay 17" regular season ticket holders.

The box office opened at 6:30 pm. The queue for the Gallery level moved quickly. Soon we found ourselves at the very top level, just beneath the circular roof.

It was my first time to see the Russian pianist Evgeny Kissin. After a brilliant performance of Brahms's second piano concerto, the audience applauded until he had to give not one, but two encores.

Although the floor was less comfortable than seats, I enjoyed the freedom of being able to lie on the ground and close my eyes. Of course, I couldn't do that with Kissin. He deserved a standing ovation!

Matisse Picasso

Most people have heard of Picasso. Some have heard of Matisse. But how many have put the two together? Were they friends or rivals?

I led my mother and eight friends to the Tate Modern, which is located on the south bank of Thames, within walking distance from the Millennium Bridge which is accessible from St Paul's or Blackfriar's tube station. The converted power station is an

impressive building which contains several art galleries.

My mother and I spent almost two hours visiting this special exhibit. I enjoyed following the compare and contrast of the two artists' lives, how they inspired each other, and how they influenced each other. At times, it was difficult to tell the difference - which was Picasso's, which was Matisse's.

Like other exhibits that spanned an artist's entire life, this one showed the struggles and chaos that led to the final simplicity and control. I think life is like that - a journey of experimentation, discovery, feedback, and learning - acquiring knowledge, contacts, experience, and material things - only to reach the final stage of convergence and giving it all away.

While in the beginning Matisse and Picasso may be very different: colour vs drawing; calm and unity vs conflict and fragmentation, the more we study their work, the more similar they are. We might think that we are all different and unique, but in the end we come to realise that we are more similar than we are different.

Role play at the Duchess

"Role Play" is one of three comedies in the Damsel in Distress trilogy currently playing in central London. Watching it with my married friend, I could see why a man would back out of his engagement before going from the frying pan into the fire.

How daughters are like their mothers! Before you propose to your live-in girlfriend, make sure you've met her mother. If she sings while she washes dishes, if she mumbles the same phrases, then beware.

Barely ten minutes into the play, I already decided that I was not Julie, the perfectionist, control freak girlfriend. I could see myself making a mountain out of a mole hill in the tense moments before a dinner party. I would probably run out to get a fork to replace the

missing one. But that would be the me ten years ago.

It is brilliantly written, brilliantly cast, and brilliantly acted! We were trying so hard not to laugh too loudly! But every other sentence was cause for another big outburst.

The boyfriend Justin is a computer programmer. He wears glasses and walks with a slight hunch. He is a geek, an ever so nice lad who has been dominated by his alcoholic mother since childhood and is about to be dominated by his perfectionist girlfriend into proposing marriage.

There is so much anticipation for the boyfriend's mother to appear. You hear him answering the telephone, "Yes, Mother." You know something is up. She keeps stopping for a drink until she shows up at the dinner party completely plastered. She is the mother who has a foot permanently in her mouth. Nothing she says is ever tactful.

Why did I enjoy it so much? Because I haven't read any previews or reviews? Perhaps so. But equally, I think I've been there before: stepping on eggshells with cold feet. And everything goes horribly wrong. I didn't think it was funny then. But I sure do now!

Chicago, the musical

For more than a year now, the posters of thinly clad beautiful women have been enticing London underground travellers to see the musical Chicago. I was curious what the hype was all about.

My friend surprised me by getting tickets to see Chicago yesterday. We sat in the first row of the Dress Circle - pretty good spot.

The star of the show was none other than the Big Breakfast presenter Denise Van Outen, whose photos were on many of the posters. Blonde, slender, and big breasted, she fitted the role of Roxy very well. "Roxy rocks Chicago."

What lengths ordinary people go to get fame. With fame comes fortune, presumably. Even if it's infamous fame, getting your name in the

newspapers was one sure way to guarantee happiness. At least for a little while, for Roxy, that is.

The costumes were all black, lacy, sheer, sexy, and minimalist. As I watched the performers sing, dance, and act, I couldn't help recalling my student days in musical production. As rehearsal and orchestral pianist, I was never on stage but in the pit. Chicago's band was in centre stage and enjoying every minute of it. That surely must be the best job - to get paid to do what you would do anyway. To get paid to play. To move your body, make use of all your faculties --- ah! So why would anyone want to sit in an office all day long?

London open house

The 73 page booklet "21-22 September 2002, Free entry to more than 500 buildings across the capital. London Open House, Celebrating London's architecture" contained too many choices. Should I go to Westminster where there are 88 buildings open to the public? Or should I start in the borough where I live? There are churches, manor houses, office buildings, converted warehouses, oddly shaped buildings, and private homes.

Ideally, I'd like to visit private homes because they are usually not open to the public. These are homes that have spectacular architectural interest to me.

In the last three hours of the second day of this event, I managed to visit three places with my friend. The Palace Wharf facing the River Thames houses some 80 artists. It was built in 1907 as a wharf for marble importing, later a decorative plaster works. At Colet House, I got to play on their three Bluthner grand pianos. In the final 30 minutes, we visited the Bhavan Centre, also known as the Institute of Indian Culture.



Editor

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